Telework and the Manager-Employee Relationship

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Abstract

Leaders within the federal government recognize the important role that telework plays in supporting and maintaining a healthy work-life balance for its workforce. While much has been written about the positive effects of telework, almost no attention has been paid to the impact it can have on relationships.

This paper examines telework's impact on relationships, specifically the manager-employee relationship. The importance of the manager-employee relationship cannot be overstated, because the quality of that relationship will more than likely affect the overall health and performance of an organization. And telework radically changes that relationship. It changes not only the way managers and employees interact, but how they view each other and their organization. Understanding the psychological effects of telework will better prepare our workforce to function in an increasingly virtual work environment.

Using a causal-comparative research method, this paper examines the impact that telework can have on relationships and makes some suggestions on how to improve telework training in order to help build and maintain a positive work environment.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is delineated in the Presidential Memorandum entitled "Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Programs" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2014), in which the federal government acknowledges the importance of establishing workplace practices and programs that better enable employees to balance their responsibilities both at work and home. One of the workplace flexibilities mentioned in the memorandum is telework. According to the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010,

> the term 'telework' or 'teleworking' refers to a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee's position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work. (§ 6501)

"Many Government agencies and private companies have implemented policies to encourage teleworking with the hope that working away from the office will boost productivity and save money" (Vega, Anderson, & Kaplan, 2015, p. 313). Recent data seem to indicate that the number of people who telework will continue to expand. In fact, according to a recent Gallup poll, "37% of U.S. workers say they have telecommuted, up slightly from 30% last decade, but four times greater than the 9% found in 1995" (Jones, 2015).

GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com (2016) reports the following trends:

- Regular work-at-home, *among the non-self-employed population,* has grown by 103% since 2005.

- 3.7 million employees (2.8% of the workforce) now work from home at least half the time.

- The employee population as a whole grew by 1.9% from 2013 to 2014, while [the] telecommuter population grew 5.6%.

In addition, telework continues to grow in popularity especially within the federal government, where it increased by 424% between 2005 and 2014 (GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics. com, 2016, Table 2).

Managers working for the federal government not only need to be aware of these facts and trends, but must be properly trained in order to deal with the unique challenges of managing an increasingly virtual workforce.

This paper examines how "working away from the office" has an impact on the manager-employee relationship. For the purposes of this paper, telework, telecommuting, remote work, distributed workforce, and virtual workforce all mean "a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee's position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite *other than* the location from which the employee would otherwise work" (Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, § 6501).

Problem Statement

Since teleworking reduces, and in some cases totally eliminates, face-to-face communications between managers and employees, how will it be possible to build trusting relationships among employees in order to ensure organizational success? With so much emphasis being placed on nonverbal cues and their importance to effective communication, how will the absence of face-to-face interactions affect the manager-employee relationship? For

example, how will it affect the management practice known as "Management by Walking Around," in which "managers spend a lot of their time making informal visits to work areas to listen to employees thereby allowing them to keep their finger on the pulse of the organization" (BusinessDictionary.com, n.d.)? While much has been written about the positive aspects of telework such as reductions in facility costs, commuting times, and pollution, less emphasis has been placed on how relationships are changed by telework.

The Office of Personnel Management's (OPM, 2016) manager training course on telework does acknowledge that telework will change the manager-employee relationship, but it does not adequately explain the reason and theory behind the changes, nor does it provide managers with clear instruction on how to adapt to them. For example, the OPM training depicts a virtual manager stating that he is uncomfortable with telework because he cannot see his employees. Instead of providing the manager with information as to why he is having these feelings, which are "caused by a fear of a loss of control and a threat to his professional identity" according to Weisenfeld, Ragurham, and Garud (cited in Dambrin, 2004, p. 364), the training simply states that he must change.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to explore thoroughly the effects that telework has on professional relationships, with particular attention given to the manager-employee relationship. This study also looks for any gaps in telework policies and/or training that could affect the quality of the manager-employee relationship and makes suggestions for possible improvements where necessary.

Significance of This Research

The study of this topic enhances the body of knowledge on teleworking since most of what has been written mainly focuses on its financial and tangible benefits (reductions in facility costs, commuting times, pollution, employee turnover, etc.), whereas this research examines how telework affects relationships between managers and their employees. The manager-employee relationship is a foundational one that is key to the success of an organization. Understanding anything that could adversely influence that relationship is extremely important, because the quality of the manager-employee relationship will most likely have an impact on the overall performance and health of an organization.

Overview of Research Methodology

This research project relies on the results of published studies, surveys, and theories in order to examine the impact of telework, not only on the manager-employee relationship, but on the manager and employee themselves. For instance, research conducted by Golden, Veiga, and Dino (cited in Vega et al., 2015) has shown teleworking for an extensive amount of time may cause teleworkers to experience "the adverse effects of professional isolation on their performance and turnover intentions" (p. 314). Weisenfeld et al. (cited in Dambrin, 2004) have suggested "that managers tend to oppose teleworking because they link it with the change in common management roles and practices, a reduced feedback from their subordinates, a reduced control over them and, as a consequence, a threat to their professional identity" (p. 364). Understanding how telework affects both the manager and employee as individuals can be used to explain the qualitative impact of telework on the manager-employee relationship itself.

Research Questions

How does telework within the federal government change the relationship between the manager and the employee? Since telework reduces and in some cases may totally eliminate face-to-face communications, what effect will that have on the manager-employee relationship?

Research Hypotheses

For this research project, the null hypothesis (H_0) is that a reduction to or lack of face-to-face communication in a teleworking environment will make it impossible to establish effective manager-employee relationships. The alternate hypothesis (H_1) is that it remains possible to establish effective manger-employee relationships despite a reduction to or absence of face-to-face communications in a teleworking environment.

Objectives and Outcomes

The results of this research project can be used to understand the changes that occur to relationships as a result of moving from a traditional in-office work environment to a teleworking environment. Examination of these changes from an individual (manager and employee) perspective will provide greater insight and improve the chances of achieving a seamless transition when an organization decides to enact a telework program.

Limitations

Since this study was confined to the results of published studies, surveys, and theories, bias could have been introduced by the author's selection of sources and data. In addition, personal experiences and preferences regarding traditional versus virtual work environments could have introduced author bias into this study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Source documents were found by searching various databases, including Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform Complete. Categories of sources include books, dissertations, and articles from various business and psychology journals.

The sources used to support this research focus on the relational impact of telework from three different perspectives: the employee, the manager, and the organization. Source documents include the results of published studies and surveys, as well as established theories of behavior. This information is used to illustrate the impact that telework has on relationships. Suggestions and best practices were also identified in order to increase the chances of success when an organization decides to institute a telework program. This review will therefore be divided into three parts: Employee, Manager, and Organization.

The Employee

While much has been written regarding the employee benefits of telework (less interruptions, reduced commuting costs, greater autonomy, etc.), there are some potential negative aspects to consider. According to Crandall and Gao (cited in Mello, 2007, p. 254), one of the main drawbacks of telework from the employee's perspective is isolation. Employees who telework report feeling "separated from both the work environment and the work culture" (Dahlstrom, 2013, p. 441). They feel they are "out-of-sight and therefore out-of-mind and are missing opportunities for promotions, organizational rewards, informal work interactions and informal learning" (Dahlstrom, 2013, p. 441). Various explanations are given for these feelings of isolation. According to Porter and McLaughlin (cited in Dahlstrom, 2013),

> the spatial distances between individuals and groups, the types of technologies in use, the
> types of organizational culture, the demographic variability within the organization, the

degree of centralization, as well as the size, shape and type of organization are all major

components of organizational context. (p. 441)

According to Weisenfeld et al. (cited in Dahlstrom, 2013), "a central theoretical and

practical issue of telework is whether the distance and dispersion it creates will weaken the

relationship between the virtual employees and their organization" (p. 441). In addition, Thatcher

and Zhu (cited in Dahlstrom, 2013) believed that "the altered work environment of

telecommuting disrupts certain social-psychological processes underlying identification, identity

enactment, and verification in the workplace" (p. 441).

Hill, Miller, Weiner, and Colihan (cited in Dahlstrom, 2013) have summarized the issue,

saying

> the physical and cultural isolation of telecommuting creates social, psychological, and
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> organizational problems for the telecommuter…. [Telecommuters] may feel they are
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> treated differently by managers because they are not on-site [and] may experience anxiety
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> regarding job security, promotion potential as well as other feelings. These feelings may
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> alter the sense of connectedness of the employee to the organization, and affect the
>
> employee's commitment to the organization. (p. 442)

The Manager

Chaos theory and McGregor's theory X/theory Y have been used to explain some

manager reactions to telework (Stanley, 2011). In their work on chaos theory, Thietart and

Forgues (cited in Stanley, 2011, p. 39) proposed that change is lasting and once a change is

instituted there is no going back. Therefore, managers may fear that once a telework program is

instituted there is no going back, and as a result they may not support it (Stanley, 2011).

McGregor's theory X/theory Y posits two managerial views of human nature. According to McGregor (as cited in Stanley, 2011),

> a Theory X manager believes that the average worker is lazy and requires constant direct supervision and must be coerced to meet organizational objectives. While a Theory Y manager believes in the worker's self-direction and self-control to pursue organizational objectives. (pp. 43–44)

Knowledge of this theory would be extremely helpful to managers and employees alike; therefore, this theory should be included in an organization's telework training.

The Organization

An organization's culture and senior leadership play a major role in the success or failure of its telework program. Social identity theory and self-categorization theory can be used to illustrate their importance.

According to Tajfel and Turner's view of social identity theory (as cited in Stanley, 2011), "people tend to classify themselves into various social categories such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort" (p. 40). Consequently, if executive-level leadership makes telework a priority within the organizational model, then the individuals taking part in the program may see themselves as sharing a desirable social structure and may be highly motivated to participate. But if executive-level leadership fails to make telework a priority, then even people who would potentially support telework will not do so, since that behavior would place them in an undesirable group (Stanley, 2011).

Self-categorization theory, according to Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (cited in Stanley, 2011), "explains group polarization as conformity to the polarized norm which defines one's own group in contrast to the other groups within a specific social context" (p. 41).

So again, if executive-level leadership makes telework a priority, then the in-group would be defined as the one containing teleworkers and the out-group would consist of commuters (Stanley, 2011).

Finally, how an organization decides to institute telework can greatly influence the impact it will have on its employees. According to Ware and Grantham (2010), there are five core best practices that successful organizations use when developing a telework program:

1. The organization does it strategically. Senior management sponsors the program, and they make it formal and explicit.

2. Gradually the employees and the organization as whole develop different ways of working. This may involve creating new office procedures, using alternative technologies, and altering the way managers function and interact with employees. In addition, when an organization decides to allow telework, it must use different means of monitoring workers and honoring achievement.

3. Training is crucial. There must be unique training programs designed specifically for the mangers and the workers. Additionally, this training is not just a one-time occurrence; successful organizations requires annual recertification.

4. A successful telework program has collaborative technologies at its core. In addition to the usual email, conference calls, and instant messages, it should use Internet chat rooms, teleconferencing, and other means of communication.

5. Success requires careful planning and strong implementation. Good telework programs involve more than improving facilities and letting your people work from home; they typically necessitate major changes in the organization and in the corporate culture.

Summary

      The literature review revealed that more has been written about the financial and tangible

benefits of telework (reductions in facility costs, commuting times, pollution, employee turnover,

etc.) than about the impact it has on relationships. While the OPM (2016) acknowledges that

telework will change the manager-employee relationship, it does not adequately explain the

reason and theory behind the changes, nor does it provide managers with any clear instruction on

how to adapt to them. The sources used to support this research focused mainly on the impact

that telework has on relationships using established theories as well as the results and findings of

surveys and studies to explain how and why telework fundamentally changes the way employees

view their managers, their co-workers, and their organization. Knowledge of these relational

changes could be used to design training and policies to improve the overall quality of an

organization's telework program.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative strategy that uses causal-comparative research to explore the impact that telework has on the manager-employee relationship.

Research Hypothesis

For this research project, the null hypothesis (H_0) is that a reduction to or lack of face-to-face communication in a teleworking environment will make it impossible to establish effective manager-employee relationships. The alternate hypothesis (H_1) is that it remains possible to establish effective manger-employee relationships despite a reduction to or absence of face-to-face communications in a teleworking environment.

Research Design

This research project utilized the results of published studies, surveys, and theories to examine the impact of telework on the manager-employee relationship. The key variable in this study is the amount of face-to-face communication that occurs between the manager and employee, since telework reduces or altogether eliminates face-to-face communications. With so much emphasis being placed on nonverbal cues and their importance to effective communication, how will a reduction in face-to-face interactions affect the manager-employee relationship? The findings of this research could be used to develop policies, procedures, and training in order to eliminate or mitigate the negative effects that can occur as a result of telework.

Data Collection

Source documents used to conduct this research were found by searching various databases, including Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform Complete, as well as official agency and organizational sites like the White House, the United States Government Publishing

Office and OPM. Categories of sources include books, dissertations, laws, official memoranda, online training materials, and articles from various business and psychology journals. Much of the information used to support the study was drawn from primary sources. Online searches for training were performed in order to examine how the current training addresses relationships in a teleworking environment.

Bias and Error

Since this study relies on the results of published studies, surveys, and theories, there was no control over the data that was used or any bias that could have been part of those original works. Personal experiences and preferences regarding traditional versus teleworking work environments could introduce bias into this study as well. Finally, it may be possible that the cause of the change to the manager-employee relationship cannot be attributed to only one variable, but could be the result of a combination of a number of variables.

Research Validity

Search parameters were structured in such a way as to ensure that the data that was discovered focused on the impact that telework had on the manager-employee relationship given the reduction in face-to-face communications that accompany it.

Reliability of Responses

Much that has been written about telework has emphasized its financial and tangible benefits (reduction in commuter and facility costs, less employee turnover, etc.) while less attention has been paid to the relationship aspects of telework. However, "the results of primary studies on the effects of telework have been mixed," with some studies resulting in positive outcomes while others have been negative (Vega et al., 2015, p. 313). "These mixed results show

that the study of telecommuting requires more attention and that its effects are not fully known"

(Vega et al., 2015, p. 314).

Chapter 4 – Findings

One of the main differences between the traditional in-office work environment and the teleworking environment is the reduction of, or in some cases a total elimination of, face-to-face communications between the manager and the employee. Teleworking environments rely heavily on technology-mediated communication (email, voice mail, video conferencing, etc.), which some believe is a less effective way to convey nuances of meaning that are essential to the development of interpersonal relationships (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). In addition, a lack of face-to-face communication can lead to feelings of professional isolation, which can hurt employee performance (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008). The literature discussed in Chapter 2 reveals that while much has been written about telework, most academic papers "do not give any specific answer to the question of telework's influence on the manager-employee relationship" (Dambrin, 2004, p. 362). While much is known about employees' relationships in a traditional work setting, less is understood, according to Thatcher and Zhu (cited in Dahlstrom, 2013), about how telework affects the employee's commitment and job satisfaction and the "potential impact these can have on the overall performance of an organization" (p. 439). This chapter examines these changes in relationships in order to answer the research question and validate the research hypothesis.

Analysis

> According to Fonner and Roloff, primary studies on the effects of teleworking have been somewhat mixed. On one hand, several primary studies suggest teleworking results in positive outcomes. Telework has been shown to have beneficial relationships with job satisfaction, supervisor-rated performance, work-family balance and reduced stress and turnover intentions. (cited in Vega et al., 2015, p. 313)

Yet, despite these numerous benefits there are some potential shortcomings or limitations of telework. If telework is not planned, designed, and implemented properly, it can result in more cost than benefit to employers, especially when employees telework a majority of the time (Mello, 2007).

How telework can affect the employee. "The two primary challenges that teleworkers may face are an excess of autonomy and less face-to-face communication with those at the office" (Golden,Veiga, & Dino, 2008). These can lead to professional isolation, which can hurt performance and increase employee turnover, especially when employees telework an extensive amount of the time. A study by Golden, Veiga, and Dino (2008) was designed specifically to measure the impact of telework on job performance and turnover intentions. Two-hundred sixty-one professional-level teleworkers at a high-tech corporation participated in a survey that considered time spent teleworking, face-to-face interaction, and access to communication-enhancing technology (high-speed Internet, audio/video conferencing, Web meeting software, etc.). The survey results found that isolation lowered job performance and that the employees who spent extensive amounts of time teleworking exhibited the lowest level of performance (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008). In addition, employees who telework frequently reported feeling more excluded from the workplace and had higher levels of family-to-work conflict (Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006).

Family-to-work conflict occurs when the employee's family responsibilities interfere with his work responsibilities. The survey results seem to indicate an upper limit or a point of "diminishing returns" when it comes to the frequency of telework. Exceeding this limit can result in problems for both the employee and the organization.

According to Baruch, Gibson, Blackwell, Dominics, and Demerath (cited in Mello, 2007), professional isolation can cause "some employees to have misgivings about the loss of such social interaction as well as an associated fear that career advancement may be stalled by the off-site employees being both 'out of work' and 'out of mind'" (p. 254). Crandall, Gao, Khalifa, and Davidson (as cited in Mello, 2007) contend that this could lead to them not being considered for promotions or missing out on "good projects" (p. 255). They may also feel uncertainty, according Baruch, Nicholson, Scott, and Timmerman (as cited in Mello, 2007), "regarding their relationship with those at the physical work site and frustration over potential doubts that co-workers may not view them as a serious employee" (p. 255).

Regarding telework and turnover intentions, the findings have also been mixed. One study by Golden, Veiga, and Dino (2008) found that employees who teleworked the most were surprisingly the least likely to leave the organization, although the reason for this result was unclear. Perhaps these employees had lost confidence in their abilities and, as a result, felt that they were no longer marketable, or maybe these employees valued telework so much they were willing to accept the negative effects of professional isolation (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008).

Another study (Hill et al., cited in Dahlstrom, 2013) looked at the work-life balance of 249 IBM employees and found that many of them reported that they were working longer hours because telework had "blurred" the line between home and the office. As a result, the employees felt as if they were "working all the time," which could lead to employee burn-out and cause employee turnover rates to actually increase.

According to Gajendran and Harrison (cited in Vega et al., 2015), teleworking leads to greater autonomy and empowerment because "nobody is physically monitoring the teleworking employee" and "teleworkers have discretion in how, under what conditions and sometimes even

when they have to complete tasks" (p. 315). As a result, telework reduces the importance of the manager in the employee's eyes because now the employee is solving customer problems autonomously (Dambrin, 2004). Furthermore, as the managers' importance diminishes, communications between managers and employees start to suffer.

A case study by Dambrin (2004) on the sales force of an electronics manufacturing firm can be used to illustrate this. This company's sales personnel spent 75 percent of their working time outside the office. The study focused on the amount of communications that were taking place between the company's sales force and its managers. Data was collected through the use of semistructured interviews and by observing the number of emails and phone calls that were made by both the employees and their managers. For instance, during one morning observation, an employee sent their direct manager only two emails (out of 16 sent) and gave him no phone calls (out of 17 made). The study found that telework actually encouraged communication to occur "vertically between the teleworker and his superiors located at higher levels rather than with his or her direct manager thus reducing the importance of professional and social status" (p. 367). And while telework discourages communication between the employee and manager, it encourages communication between the teleworker and their peers/customers (Dambrin, 2004). "It places the worker on the edge of the company's frontier, making them communicate more frequently with people who do not belong to the company" (p. 368). Finally, when communication actually does occur between the manager and the employee, "telework increases the possible bias in interpretations" (p. 366), caused by a lack of face-to-face communication, since you can get the wrong perception "through a simple phone call due to distance and time distortion" (p. 366).

Finally, according to Hill et al. (as cited in Dahlstrom, 2013),

the physical and cultural isolation of telecommuting creates social, psychological, and

organizational problems for the telecommuter. Teleworkers may feel that they are treated

differently by managers because they are not on-site and as a result they may experience

anxiety regarding job security, promotion potential and other issues important to them.

These feelings may alter the employee's sense of connectedness and commitment to the

organization. The related organizational outcomes may present themselves in higher

turnover rates and lower job satisfaction ratings. (p. 442)

How telework can affect the manager. According to D'Amours (cited in Dambrin,

2004), telework radically transforms the manager's role. The manager's "traditional roles consist

of giving instructions to the employees, controlling the task's execution, controlling employee

behavior and making sure the work is accomplished," but telework changes all of that (p. 364).

"Due to distance the employee is out of reach, sight and hearing," so the manager cannot

exercise control over them as he used to" (p. 364). Middle managers, according to Weisenfeld et

al. (cited in Dambrin, 2004), "tend to be opposed to telework since they link it with a change in

common management roles and practices, a reduced feedback from subordinates, a reduced

control over them and, as a consequence, a threat to their professional identity" (p. 364).

Studies have revealed that middle management resistance to telework is one of the most

significant hurdles an organization must overcome if it is to have a successful telework program

(Stanley, 2011). As an example, Peters, den Dulk, and de Ruijter (2010) collected data from 65

managers in six financial sector companies located in the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United

Kingdom. These companies employed 1,500 or more personnel. Interviews were conducted with

10 managers from each company. Vignettes were used to ascertain each manager's attitude

towards telework. The study revealed that managers' attitudes towards telework depended on

which view they held of the employment relationship (governance, exchange, or cooperation). The governance relationship is founded on the belief that employees can't be trusted. Managers displaying this attitude would tend to be resistant to telework. The exchange relationship is founded on the belief that if the organization invests in the employee it will receive a return on its investment in the form of a higher level of commitment and engagement. Managers displaying this attitude would tend to support telework, but only for those employees that they felt were worth investing in. The cooperation relationship assumes that managers trust their teleworking employees. Managers with this attitude would tend to support telework the most.

Several theories have also been used to explain why middle managers are resistant to telework. These include chaos theory, social identity theory, self-categorization theory, and McGregor's theory X/theory Y (Stanley, 2011).

Chaos theory introduces the concept of chaos or change. Thietart and Forgues (cited in Stanley, 2011) proposed that chaotic change is lasting and irreversible (p. 39). Because telework represents a change from the traditional in-office work environment, managers who embrace the status quo would resist telework since they believe that once it is instituted there is no going back (Stanley, 2011).

According to Tajfel and Turner's view of social identity theory (cited in Stanley, 2011), "people tend to classify themselves into various social categories such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort" (p. 40). Therefore, if the executive-level leadership doesn't make telework a priority and doesn't support it, managers are less likely to support it, since supporting telework would place them in an undesirable group (Stanley, 2011).

Self-categorization theory, according to Turner et al. (cited in Stanley, 2011), "explains group polarization as conformity to a polarized norm which defines one's own group in contrast to other groups within a specific social context" (p. 41.) Here again, if the executive-level leadership of an organization doesn't support telework, middle managers won't either, because according to self-categorization theory, they will wish to be identified as a member of the in-group (in this case the executive-level leadership) (Stanley, 2011).

McGregor's theory X/theory Y proposes that there are two types of managers. "Theory X managers believe that the average employee is lazy, must be watched constantly, and doesn't really care whether or not organzational objectives are achieved. Theory Y managers believe that employees have self-direction and self-control to pursue organizational objectives" (cited in Stanley, 2011, pp. 43–44). Knowledge of McGregor's theory could be used to tailor telework training programs to address the specific concerns of individual managers in order to reduce the chances of resistance.

In an effort to improve the lives of its employees, the federal government continues to push for the expansion of telework. While telework has been shown to have many positive effects for both the employee and the organization, almost no attention has been paid to the impact that telework can have on professional relationships. Understanding the psychological impact of telework on employees and managers will enable agencies to develop training programs that better prepare managers and employees for telework. Educating the employee about professional isolation and explaining the reasons why some managers fear a loss of control will improve the chances of a successful telework program and will improve the chances that the manager and employee will have a trusting relationship. Trust between manager and the employee is key. The manager-employee relationship is the foundation on which an

organization's success rests. This relationship will affect every other relationship inside and outside of the organization, therefore it must be strong if the organization is to fulfill its mission. Finally, the importance of genuine executive-level leadership support for telework cannot be over emphasized, because without it a telework program will never truly thrive. Without genuine support from above, middle managers will not fully embrace telework, manager-employee relationships will break down, and consequently the organization as a whole will more than likely suffer.

Chapter 5 – Interpretation

Conclusions

Evidence-based research gathered for this project has revealed that, despite a lack of face-to-face communication, it is still possible to establish effective manager-employee relationships in a teleworking environment. The health of those relationships will depend largely on the three key elements outlined below.

Not all employees should telework. Telework requires self-discipline, self-motivation, and job proficiency. "Employees afforded the opportunity to telework must be able to work with little to no direct supervision and with minimal face-to-face contact with co-workers" (Mello, 2007, p. 258). Employees who have not demonstrated these qualities should not be allowed to telework. In addition, the type of work to be performed must be considered. Task-oriented work seems to lend itself more to telework, whereas work that requires teamwork or face-to-face contact with clients does not.

Now more than ever, choose your managers wisely. Today's manager must be comfortable with managing people that are outside of their direct observation and control. They must be thoroughly familiar with the individual needs of each of their employees. This is especially important in a teleworking environment because

> some employees need and/or desire a good deal of interaction with co-workers and a more social environment whereas others prefer to work in greater social isolation. Some employees need and/or desire regular or continuous feedback from supervisors where others are more self-motivated and/or satisfied by self-generated feedback from the work itself. (Mello, 2007, p. 258)

Managers must also be able to trust that their employees' interests are in line with the interests of the organization. Constantly "checking-up" on their teleworking employees due to a lack of trust will only result in damaging the manager-employee relationship.

Effective communication with teleworkers is imperative. Managers of teleworkers must be excellent communicators and be competent in using various methods of online communications (Internet chat rooms, Skype, Twitter, audio/video conferencing, online videos, podcasts, etc.). While the foregoing methods of communication have been shown to be effective in teleworking environments, managers should still be encouraged to meet face-to-face with their employees as often as possible.

Organizational support is key to success. Support from executive-level management is a must if a telework program is to thrive. Executive-level managers must see that specific individualized training is developed for the employees, mid-level managers, and executive-level leaders in order to ensure that every member of the organization understands the impact that telework will have on them as individuals and on the working environment as a whole. Specific emphasis should be placed on the training of the mid-level managers, as studies show that they are the primary reason for the slow adoption of telework. Executive-level management must support middle managers' decisions regarding both an employee's ability to telework and their frequency of doing so. Executive-level management must ensure that the computer systems and networks support a teleworking environment, so that there is no degradation in work production or output when compared to a traditional in-office work environment. Finally, since "telework involves a stark contrast to traditional means of on-site employment, employers who permit telework must utilize different management practices than employers who don't offer telework" (Mello, 2007, p. 259). Therefore, "the development and implementation of a comprehensive

performance management system" is crucial in a teleworking environment (Mello, 2007, p. 258).

Organizations that "have established performance management and feedback systems that focus

on goal-setting and/or objective-based performance" find that they work best with telework (in

addition to limiting managerial resistance)" (Mello, 2007, p. 258).

Recommendations

Research gathered for this project has revealed that telework definitely changes the way

managers and employees view not only each other but the organization as well. Knowledge of

these impacts, and an understanding of the reasons behind them, will greatly improve the

chances for a successful telework program. Therefore supervisory, employee, and executive-

level telework training should be changed as described in the paragraphs below.

Supervisory telework training for mid-level managers. Supervisory telework training

for mid-level managers should be expanded to include blocks of instruction on the theory and

psychology behind mid-level managers' tendency to resist telework and the importance of

establishing a trusting relationship with the employee. They must understand professional

isolation and how to mitigate it and the possibility of excess autonomy and how it can influence

the way employees view and communicate with mid-level managers. Mid-level managers must

also be proficient with all forms of online communications. And finally, the establishment of

comprehensive performance management and feedback systems that focus on goal-setting and/or

objective-based performance is one of the most effective ways of addressing supervisor

resistance to telework (Mello, 2007).

Telework training for employees. Telework training for employees should be expanded

to include blocks of instruction on professional isolation, the theory and psychology behind mid-

level managers' tendency to resist telework, and the importance of frequent communication with

their direct manager and with other personnel in the office. It should also emphasize the importance of establishing a trusting relationship with their direct manager.

      Telework training for executive-level leadership. Telework training should be specifically developed for the executive-level leadership of the organization. It should include instruction on the theory and psychology behind mid-level managers' tendency to resist telework, an awareness of professional isolation and excess autonomy, and the importance of executive-level leaders' genuine endorsement of and support for telework.

Limitations of the Study

      The findings of this research paper were based on the results of studies and surveys that were not designed nor conducted by the author of this study. Nor were those studies intended to answer this paper's specific research question. Therefore, it is possible that either the wrong types of studies were selected or that their results have been misinterpreted or unintentionally misrepresented.

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